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**DENIAL OF THE IMMATERIAL SUBSTANCE IN EARLY 18TH
CENTURY POST-LOCKEAN THOUGHT: THE CASES OF
DR. COWARD AND MR. COLLINS**

Master's Thesis in Philosophy

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Introduction

By the beginning of 18th century, the belief that humans consisted of two substances – immaterial substance called soul and material substance called body – had in some shape or form been prevalent in Christian thought for nearly one and a half millennia. From early Church fathers – who were influenced by Platonic understanding – and medieval scholastics – who subscribed to Aristotelian hylomorphism – to Cartesian substance dualists in 17th century, orthodox Christian thinkers had always used and created theories that had reaffirmed the dualistic nature of human beings. However, this does not mean that this recognized doctrine had not encountered any opposition. Quite a few notable authors including Overton, Milton, Hobbes, Locke had expressed their doubt regarding the accepted nature and existence of immaterial substance. In my thesis I aim to investigate the legacy of those authors in the first decades of 18th century Britain. I will reconstruct a wide variety of arguments and strategies used to take on the monumental task of going against church's authority and centuries of tradition. As I will show, immaterial substance was far from being an unproblematic concept and different authors brought different arguments against its incomprehensible nature.

While researching relevant literature I recognized that authors who argued against the existence of immaterial substance were usually representatives of one of two groups of thinkers – they were either Christian mortalists or philosophical materialists. Christian mortalism, as Norman Burns puts it,

was based on a wholehearted belief in the Word of God, as it was set down in the Holy Scriptures [...]. Arguments from reason, if they were used at all, were doubtless used [...] to convince those whose religion was so weak that scriptural proof alone was not sufficient to win their assent. (Burns 1972: 3-4)

This kind of sentiment has also been approved by Bryan Ball in his more recent study of mortalism: “Burns also recognises that English mortalism was “based on a wholehearted belief in the Word of God”, rather than deriving solely or even in part from philosophical rationalism” (Ball 2008: 16). This kind of definition, though it correctly identifies the key role of Scripture in mortalist argumentations seems to unjustly diminish the role of philosophical arguments in mortalist views. It seems to me that though mortalist focus was on Scripture, philosophical arguments were also often used to further mortalist cause.¹ This is also the case in William Coward, mortalist who this thesis focuses on.

¹ For example, philosophical inclinations are already present in the title of Overton's – first major British mortalist's – main work *Man wholly mortal, or, A treatise wherein 'tis proved, both theologically and philosophically* [...] (Overton 1675, my emphasis).

Contrary to Christian mortalists, philosophical materialists did not fixate on the meaning of Scripture but rather based their arguments solely on philosophy and reason. This means that though usually religiously inclined, they did not bring specific passages from Scripture as arguments against immaterial substance. Rather they were inspired by John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), and mainly focused on proving that thinking – a power usually ascribed to the immaterial substance – could be better explained to be a faculty in material substance. In my thesis the materialist philosophy is represented by the free thinker Anthony Collins. As both Coward and Collins are relatively unknown authors, a short introduction is necessary.

William Coward (1657? –1725) was an English physician who at the first decade of 18th century earned notoriety for his unconventional interpretation of Scripture. Though his first works were published anonymously under a pseudonym Estibius Psychalethes and later works only received his initials, his authorship did not remain a mystery for long. In 1703 his *Grand Essay* (1703) and *Second Thoughts* (1702) were both examined by the House of Commons, declared heretical, and ordered burnt. This investigation revealed Coward as the author, who claimed not to have meant anything against religion or morality but apologized if it had turned out that way. His apology seems to have worked, because other than expected raise in the interest for his books, he personally did not suffer any repercussions. (Kippis 1789: 360-2)²

Anthony Collins (1676 – 1729) is perhaps best known for his critical approach to Scripture and continued defences of reason against authority, but he was also a disciple and a close friend of Locke's whose ideas he developed into a fully-fledged materialist philosophy. Most notably so in his public *Correspondence* (1707-08) with Samuel Clarke. Together with John Toland he was one of the most influential free thinkers in Britain – together they also wrote the *Discourse of Free Thinking* (1723)³ – allegedly the first manifest of enlightenment.⁴ However, as the topic of this thesis is rather mortalism and materialism, I will leave Collins' free thinking aside and focus mainly on the arguments he brings in *Correspondence*.⁵

I aim to follow both of these authors' lines of thinking, delve deeply into philosophical and Scriptural arguments, and show what role these arguments played in Coward's and Collins'

² See also account of Cowards process in *Journals of the House of Commons. Volume 14.* (1803) pp. 379-380.

³ Though Collins is credited for *Discourse* he did consult Toland (Agnesina 2018: 27).

⁴ At least Agnesina claims so (ibid 177).

⁵ Admittedly, different genres impose different restrictions on the content and as a result it is possible that Collins is more restricted while writing his answers to Clarke than Coward, who has no direct interlocutor. However, I am still forced to take *Correspondence* as a basis for my comparison as Collins does not present nor develop his materialist arguments to such an extent in any other text.

thought. I will explain some points on which these two authors agreed on and which they did not when arguing for ultimately the same conclusion. All this fundamentally helps to paint a clearer picture of early 18th century understanding of the world and human place in it. Though new and developing sciences could explain more and more, when it came to human condition, a great deal of thought still revolved around Scripture – even philosophical argumentation had to take it into account.

My undertaking is in part justified by the fact that to my knowledge, no substantial comparison of the two systems of thought has been made – literature about Christian mortalism usually wholly neglects philosophical materialism and vice versa.⁶ This, however, means that there is a gap in understanding early 18th century thought. I do not believe that neglecting one or the other can give us a comprehensive understanding of early modern ideas especially considering – as we will see – that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Though mortalism and materialism can be considered apart, only when looked at together will a more detailed picture of early 18th century British thought emerge. A picture where Scripture was at the same time the most important source of truth and as fallible as any other eyewitness testimony.

To paint this picture, I will in first chapter summarise the most important philosophical ideas that shaped the understanding about human soul in the beginning of 18th century. This means that I have to start with Descartes substance dualism as a response to Aristotelianhylomorphism. Following Descartes, I look at Hobbes materialism as an alternative to dualism. Finally, I consider Locke who remained agnostic on the nature and existence of immaterial substance. These three authors paved the way for most of the debate that circulated human soul and so, whatever Coward and Collins claim, has to be seen in context of Descartes', Hobbes', and Locke's views.

Then, in second chapter I will focus on Christian mortalism and Coward. I will illustrate his style of arguing from Scripture, his understanding of human and God's essence. I will also explain how he understands resurrection and how he accounts for it in his system. And finally, I will show how Coward uses philosophical arguments to show that matter can account for human thought and so there is no need for immaterial soul.

⁶ Most notable exception being Ann Thomson's *Bodies of Thought* (2008) that in some detail focuses on mortalism and materialism but still mostly covers conclusions and not reasoning behind those conclusions.

In third chapter I will turn to philosophical materialism and Collins. I start off by dissecting his understanding of personal identity that resides in consciousness. Then I will explain Collins' take on thinking – how does it start, where does it come from, and how he argues for it. As Collins was a close friend of Locke's, it is also a great opportunity to see what Collins borrows from Locke and what he does with this borrowed material.

Finally, in fourth chapter, I will conclude with comparison of Coward's and Collins' views. I will see what they took from tradition, what they rejected, and how their understanding of things diverges from, or overlaps with one another. As we will have seen by then, though Coward and Collins do not always see eye to eye their worldviews together offer a comprehensive and interesting picture of early 18th century thought.

1. 17th Century Philosophical Scene

Ever since the rediscovery of his ideas at the beginning of 13th century, Aristotle had dominated western thought. Though Catholic Church could not adopt all Aristotelian ideas,⁷ the attractiveness of fundamentally intertwined metaphysical and physical systems that described the workings of everything, was simply too great to brush aside. Even protestants who were following Luther sentiment illustrated by his 1517 *Disputations Against Scholastic Theology* that “the whole Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light” (Luther via Stern 2020) and thus sought every possibility to distance themselves from Aristotle, still had no alternative but to teach Aristotle in schools (Martin 2014: 4). This sole dependence on Aristotle, however, finally came to an end during the 17th century as alternatives to both Aristotelian physics and metaphysics presented themselves.

In physics mechanical philosophy developed by Hobbes, Descartes, and others tried to give a new way of explaining processes behind natural events. Aristotelian causality-based explanation was cut down from four types of causes (material, formal, efficient, and final) to just one – efficient cause – that explained everything by a small set of basic principles that governed matter in motion (Hutton 2015: 162-3, 165-6). Additionally, atomism was rediscovered and developed into a possible alternative to Aristotle’s concept of matter. According to atomists, matter was not formless bulk, but rather consisted of simple particles of atoms with different shapes. When joined together in different ways, these atoms produced different types of matter (ibid: 167). Experimental method developed by Boyle and Bacon changed the way scientists and philosophers approached nature (ibid: 169). Finally Newton’s *Principia* (1687) could be seen as a conclusion of these developments. He finished what mechanical philosophy had started and presented his laws of motion and gravitation that – with time – became the touchstone for all sciences. With it he also legitimized experimental approach to science even more than Boyle or Bacon could (ibid 181-4).

These developments in science were accompanied⁸ by seemingly contradictory or even – as Jacopo Agnesina names it – schizophrenic religious situation of the late 17th century. On one hand, intellectuals ridiculed and even denied the possibility of speculative atheism. On the other hand, charges of atheism were common and the need to defend orthodox religious thought

⁷ For instance, Aristotle’s understanding that universe was eternal.

⁸ Science and religion in 17th century were not seen as two opposing ways of explanation but rather worked together. Scientists were tasked with reading and understanding the ‘book of nature’ that – because it was also written by God – mirrored Holy Scriptures. Understanding how world works became a way into understanding God (Hutton 2015: 161-2).

seemed greater than ever before (Agnesina 2018: 10-11). Part of the explanation that might better help to understand this situation is that ‘atheism’ in early modern context had a different meaning to that we are used to. Broadly speaking, atheists could be divided into two groups – practical and speculative. Practical atheism mainly manifested itself in immoral behaviour (Friedenthal 2012: 224). It was not a well thought out and polished philosophical strategy but rather consisted of occasional problematic remarks, such as doubting the existence of heaven or hell or showing contempt for church’s activities (ibid: 225). In short, practical atheist was not someone who denied the existence of God, but rather someone whose behaviours or claims could be interpreted as denial (ibid: 226).

While lack of education was usually seen as the cause for practical atheism, speculative or theoretical atheism was rather result of too high opinion of one’s knowledge as this charge usually accompanied those who developed mechanical or materialistic explanations of the universe. Just like in the case of practical atheism, here too the accusation did not arise from what was explicitly stated by the author but rather what could be derived from their theories (ibid: 2012: 229, 233). This means that shadow of atheism hovered over most of philosophers represented in this thesis – more so with Hobbes, Coward, and Collins but even Descartes and Locke did encounter their share of accusations.

In this fearful setting then,⁹ new sciences – especially Newton’s laws – were seen as a perfect means to prove to questionably educated or border-line atheistic people, not only the intelligent design of the universe but also ever-present nature of intelligent designer.¹⁰ Thus, Newton’s laws – perhaps most notably in series of lectures set up by Boyle¹¹ – became intertwined with religious argumentation – their defence could almost be seen as defence of religious orthodoxy (Agnesina 2018: 152-3, 156-7).

Desire to vindicate religion and save it from atheists were also the motivating forces in metaphysics, especially behind Rene Descartes – another critic of Aristotle in the 17th century.¹² His attempts to overcome Aristotle led him to construct new metaphysics that

⁹ And keeping in mind the previous footnote.

¹⁰ As an example, the law of universal gravitation proved that world was created by intelligent being – as this law seemed rational in itself – and that this intelligent being had to constantly interfere with his creation – as otherwise gravity would force planets in solar system to collide with one another (see Agnesina 2018: 156).

¹¹ Robert Boyle had left in his will instructions to host series of lectures where Christian religion is defended against “notorious Infidels, viz. Atheist, Theists, Pagans, Jews and Mahometans” (Boyle via Agnesina: 2018: 11).

¹² It must be stated, however that Descartes did not wish the anti-Aristotelian aspects of his philosophy to be broadly broadcasted as it could turn Aristotelians away from his metaphysics. Rather he hoped people would first see the virtues of his philosophy and only then realize the consequences it has for Aristotelian system. (Friedenthal 2014: 21)

postulated the existence of two clearly and distinctly separate substances – immaterial substance and material substance. This substance dualism became the foundation of 17th century religious and metaphysical debate. However not everyone agreed with Descartes' conclusion. Another metaphysics-shaping author Thomas Hobbes thought that immaterial substance is a nonsensical term that could not designate anything in real world as all that could exist is material. Finally, John Locke could be located somewhere between Descartes and Hobbes as his agnostic stance on existence of immaterial substance led him neither to deny nor to confirm its existence. Though it would not be entirely accurate to claim that any of these authors managed to definitively overthrow Aristotle's influence, following their work there is a clear shift in metaphysical thinking that needs to be explained in more detail to grasp the intellectual atmosphere that leads us into 18th century. Only when acquainted with Descartes', Hobbes', and Locke's philosophies, will the ideas of Coward and Collins become understandable.

1.1 René Descartes's Substance Dualism

Though Descartes himself saw his project as a great benefit to religious thought, neither Catholic nor Protestant churches were especially keen on implementing Descartes' new mechanical philosophy. For Catholics – ever since Thomas Aquinas had adopted Aristotle's philosophy – Aristotle had been the single most authoritative philosopher. This meant that Descartes' system – that not only undermined Aristotle but also would require a re-evaluation of some canonical Catholic teachings¹³ – became simply unacceptable. Protestants, who had long been waiting for alternatives to Aristotle, were more welcoming, but even they hesitated to adopt a mechanical system that turned animals into machines and left ample room for atheists to do the same with humans (see Henry 2020). Regardless, Descartes himself thought that not his new mechanical philosophy but rather Aristotelian metaphysics was dangerous to religion as it had mistakenly blurred the line between soul and body. Only when recognising the opposite and incompatible natures of the two substances can one "... understand much better the arguments which prove that our soul is of nature entirely independent of the body, and consequently that it is not bound to die with it." (Descartes 1985: 141, AT VI 59). To

¹³ One good example would be a Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. It claims that in the sacrament of Holy Communion the accidents of the bread and wine remain the same but their substances changes into Christ's body and blood. As Descartes denied the possibility of such substantial changes, the theory would have had to be revised (Friedenthal 2012: 232).

understand what exactly troubled Descartes in Aristotelian notion of soul, we must look at Aristotle's metaphysics.

In Aristotelian metaphysics a soul was given multitude of tasks to perform, including shaping and moving bodies, perceiving the world around it, and all kinds of intellectual acts (Lorenz 2009). All these tasks were divided between different faculties in soul – nutrition, perception, desire, and intellect. Nutritive part of the soul is responsible for growing and shaping matter in accordance with its final shape (Shields 2020). Perceptive part is responsible for receiving sense-data and delivering it to intellect. Mind or intellect transforms sense-data into thoughts and is responsible for all intellectual activities. Finally, desiring faculty helps to explain desires and as such is sometimes – not always – one of the initiators of movement (ibid). Humans are the only living things who possess all of these faculties. Animals are step lower and devoid of intellectual faculty, and plants only need nutritive souls as they do not perceive, think or desire anything.

But Aristotle did not think that soul could be capable of performing those activities on its own. Almost every faculty of soul had to be joined to some organ and only together could they exercise their potential.¹⁴ For example, only when perceptive faculty of the soul is joined to eyes can seeing occur (ibid). This co-dependent union between soul and body in Aristotle's system is also known as hylomorphism. One of the key aspects of which is that as soul and body – or form and matter in general – depend on each other, they cannot be separated (ibid).

Descartes was intimately familiar with Aristotle's teaching as he had received his education from Jesuit College of La Flèche that followed Aristotle in curriculum and content (Hatfield 2014). His attitude toward this teaching was, however, twofold. On one hand, he felt that he had learned nothing adamant and came away from his studies with only doubts. On the other hand, he admitted that all education was inevitably destined to lead to uncertainties as it was based on uncertain philosophies. It was only Descartes who was going to set forth new solid foundation for philosophy and until he could do that, he thought that education at La Flèche was as good as it gets. (ibid)

To construct this new clear and rational foundation for knowledge, Descartes first turned away from sensory data. When Aristotelian scholastics had claimed that everything we know comes from our senses, Descartes thought that trusting senses is a misleading prejudice

¹⁴ The sole exception being mind that is not mixed with body the same way perceptual faculties are. For more detailed distinction see Shields 2020.

acquired in childhood (Descartes 1988: 12; AT VII 17-18). Even if senses to some extent seem to help us orient in the world, when striving for concrete knowledge we must turn away from them as senses can and often times will deceive us. True and undoubtable knowledge comes only from our intellect. Only about things that are clearly and distinctly presented to us in our minds, can we have certain knowledge (ibid: 24; AT VII 35).

One thing that we have a clear and distinct understanding of is that mind and body are separable things (ibid: 54; AT VII 78). As a result, the world does not consist of inseparable prime matter and forms but rather of substances. Substance, for Descartes, is something that independently of other things can exist on its own. This means that fundamentally the first and only substance is God because only God is truly self-dependent (*Princ* I.51; AT VIII 24). God in turn has created two other substances: material substance and immaterial substance – body and mind – that are each characterized by their essential property – extension and thought¹⁵ respectively (*Princ* I. 52-3; AT VIII 24-5). Of course, there are other properties belonging to those substances, but these are not essential, rather dependent on the essential ones as we could conceive substances to exist without them (ibid). Descartes names those properties modes. For example, with extension comes the mode of location and with thinking come modes of will and intellect (*Princ* I. 48; AT VIII 22-3). It is important to note that as Descartes denies the existence of Aristotelian prime matter, he conceives the substances to be their essential properties – immaterial substance is thinking and not some bulk of prime matter that has thinking added to it (*Princ* I. 63; AT VIII 30-1).

Though immaterial substance could have different modes, it is evident that when compared to Aristotelian concept of soul, Descartes quite drastically limits the number of faculties present, leaving only intellectual activities to soul (Rozemond 1998: 46). Everything else – nutrition, perception – can be reduced to mechanical processes. Consequently, many creatures that in Aristotle's system were dependent on souls, do not need them in Descartes' system. In fact, as humans are the only earthly beings capable of thought, then only humans must have souls. This was exactly what Descartes tried to show when he confined the limits of soul. Only if we have a conception of soul that is independent of body and is characterised by a faculty fundamentally human, can we understand soul in way that is a most beneficial to religion (ibid: 44-6).

¹⁵ For Descartes thinking is a broad concept that covers all mental activities that we are conscious of – understanding, willing, imagining, and sensing (*Princ* I. 9; AT VIII 7-8).

However, there is at least one major difficulty in Descartes approach, namely how do those polar opposite substances interact with one another? Descartes solution was to find an intermediary that could pass signals from body to soul and vice versa. This task fell upon pineal gland that was hypothesised to be filled with animal spirits. Those animal spirits – that Descartes described as “a very fine wind, or rather a very lively and pure flame” (Descartes, via Lokhorst 2013)¹⁶ – also filled nerves. Descartes thought that when our sense organ picks up a stimulus, nerves carry this stimulus to pineal gland, where it passes into soul (Lokhorst 2013).

1.2 Thomas Hobbes’s Materialism

As I have already hinted, not everyone agreed with Descartes’ substance dualism. Perhaps one of the most notorious adversaries of the notion of immaterial substance was Thomas Hobbes. His criticism was not, however, going back to defending the Aristotelian approach, but rather moving to a wholly different type of thinking – materialism. In chapter 34 of his *Leviathan* (1651) he argues that the words ‘substance’ and ‘body’ mean the same thing. This means that claiming the existence of an immaterial substance would be equivalent to claiming the existence of a non-bodily body, which for Hobbes would be absurd. As he infamously concluded: “[...] substance incorporeal are words, which when they are joined together, destroy one another, as if a man should say, an incorporeal body” (Hobbes 1998: 261).

The non-existence of immaterial substance is also backed for Hobbes by the idea that if in religious context we happen upon incomprehensible ideas or notions – such as ‘immaterial substance’ – we should turn to Scripture and not to scholastics and philosophers for answers (Springborg 2012: 920). But when searching through Scripture for ‘immaterial substance’ we discover that it is not actually used nor explained there.¹⁷ As such we do not have any reason to suppose such substance exists or that God is made of it. As a bit of a sidenote, this kind of Scriptural interpretation converges Hobbes with Christian mortalist thinkers. Not only that, Hobbes is mortalist also in his aims, claiming that human immortality begins only after resurrection and does not derive from some special nature of “soul” but is rather given by

¹⁶ It is important to note that even though named ‘spirits’, animal spirits were commonly regarded as material – made from extremely thin matter.

¹⁷ Hobbes spends the entirety of XXXIV chapter of *Leviathan* explaining the different meanings of words ‘spirit’, ‘soul’, ‘angel’, ‘inspiration’ and concludes that none of them means immaterial substance (Hobbes 1998: 260-270).

graceful God (Hobbes 1998: 299-301). This being said, it is important not to focus solely on one side, but to recognise both philosophical and theological arguments in Hobbes' works.

Instead of immaterial substance, Hobbes claims that human beings have a 'breath of life' – a concept he borrowed from the story of Genesis. There it is told that “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7, KJV). Hobbes thinks that this 'breath of life' should be understood as vital motion or life, nothing more, nothing less (Hobbes 1998: 264, 269). As a result, matter infused with vitalizing power – not hylomorphic form-matter union nor dualistic body-soul union – should be capable of performing every human faculty.

Though – as we have just seen – Hobbes argued from Scripture, this did not grant him a safe passage from charges of atheism. Reason for this has everything to do with the different meaning of 'atheism' discussed in section 1. So, even if Hobbes did not explicitly deny God's existence the problem was rather that he had made God material (Duncan 2017).¹⁸ For Hobbes, material God was the logical conclusion – as there is no immaterial substance, everything that exists – including God and angels – has to be material. But this does not mean that we could see, touch or even accurately imagine material God. Hobbes argues that God like other angels and spirits consists of a special kind of extremely thin or fluid matter – breath, air, wind, or something similar – that we cannot perceive (Springborg 2012: 917-8). As we cannot perceive God, we also cannot have any knowledge of God in Hobbesian empiricist philosophy other than that God must have extension, because everything that exists must have extension.

1.3 John Locke's Suggestion

While Descartes knew for certain that immaterial substance had to exist and Hobbes was convinced that it could not, John Locke did not rush to reach such adamant conclusions. He thought that given the limits of human understanding, it is possible that we can never know whether immaterial substance exists or not. Reason for such claim came from Locke's empiricism. For him, all of what we know comes to us from one of two ways of perception – either from observing outside objects or reflecting on internal mental processes (Locke, *Essay*, II.i.2). Observing outside objects can never give us proof of immaterial substance, as immateriality cannot be perceived with sight or touch. But even reflection cannot give us any

¹⁸ The list of controversial doctrines Hobbes ascribed to is of course longer, but I do not think that going into full detail is necessary for this thesis.

definitive proof of immateriality as even if we can understand that there is something in us that thinks, Locke claims that we can never know for sure the nature of this thinking thing.

This has the inevitable consequence that we cannot know whether thinking is located in the immaterial substance or not. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) Locke claimed that it is

[...] not much more remote from our comprehension to conceive that GOD can, if he pleases, superadd to matter a faculty of thinking, than that he should superadd to it another substance with a faculty of thinking... (Locke, *Essay*, IV.iii.6)

Unlike Descartes then, Locke is unwilling to make the leap from knowing that something in us thinks to knowing that this thinking is in immaterial or material substance.¹⁹ As far as humans are capable of understanding, thinking could simply be an accident that has been superadded²⁰ by God either to material or immaterial substance (Yolton 1983: 19). With this suggestion Locke granted a new foothold to all “atheists” of the late 17th and early 18th century who wanted to oppose the existence of immaterial substance. As thinking was liberated from sole confinement to the soul, one was free to suppose that only material substance exists and is responsible for every human faculty. It is important to note that regardless of the ends to which his suggestion was later used, Locke himself thought that thinking could only be superadded to matter and not self-sufficiently arise in it. This means that the first thinking being – God – cannot be material (ibid:15-17).

Another topic that for Locke is intimately connected to the unknown nature of thinking substance is the question of personal identity. As could be expected, Locke does not think that immaterial substance – that might not even exist – could seat personal identity; at least not directly. Rather he distinguishes between four different types of identities and conditions needed to preserve them. First, material bulk or body that can be considered identical to itself as long as not a single part of its composition changes (Uzgalis 2018 supplement). When a single atom gets subtracted, added, or replaced, the body is no longer identical to its previous self. Second is the identity of living organisms that does not require the sameness of every atom, but rather continued proper functioning of its organised parts. As the ultimate goal of this organisation is the preservation of life then the identity of living things remains as long as

¹⁹ Just like Descartes, Locke also takes thinking to cover wide variety of mental acts including sensation, remembrance, contemplation, judging, volition etc. (Locke, *Essay*, II. xiv 1-2).

²⁰ Superaddition is a process in which some substance is given a property that is not naturally within its potential. For example, if matter – that naturally only has extension – is to become a plant, then it needs vegetative capacities superadded to it. Similarly, sensitive capacities are superadded to matter, so it could become an animal (See supplement to John Locke Uzgalis 2018).

the same life is continued (ibid). Third type of identity is the identity of man. Locke defines man as animal or living thing and this means that the identity of man is the same with identity of other living beings and based on the continuation of same life (ibid). Finally – and most importantly – there is the identity of person that for Locke is established by consciousness. Person is the same as long as he is aware of his current and past actions and knows that he is responsible for them. As Locke writes in his *Essay*:

though the same immaterial substance, or soul, does not alone [...] make the same man; yet it is plain, *consciousness*, as far as ever it can be extended, should it be to ages past, *unites existences and actions*, very remote in time, *into the same person* [...]; so that whatever has the consciousness of present and past actions, is the same person to whom they both belong. (Locke, *Essay*, II.xxvii.16; my emphasis)

This last distinction between identity of man and person might seem a bit unmotivated, but for Locke it helps to counter the difficulties at resurrection discussed by Boyle in his *Some Physico-Theological Considerations About the Possibility of the Resurrection* (1675). At Last Judgement we have been promised to be rewarded or punished for our virtues and sins. This means, that there needs to be something that guarantees the sameness of resurrected person with living person. After all, without it any rewards or punishments would become arbitrary. Traditionally this task was given directly to soul that was to remain in Purgatory, Hades, Abraham's bosom, or some other similar place, waiting for resurrection and guaranteeing that important aspects of a person's identity are not lost with decomposing body.²¹ If the existence of soul is doubted however, something else needs to account for identity. But – like Boyle argues – having body account for identity is difficult to imagine. After death human bodies decompose and parts of them get moved to furthest corners of earth. Some are even eaten by animals or cannibals (see Boyle 1991: 198 for more). All this means is that, raising the same *man* with same organisation, organs, and body becomes quite difficult task to perform even for God. However, if we tie the personal identity with consciousness, the problems with gathering the exact same body disappear – all that is needed is a body that at resurrection has the same consciousness given to it to be identical to the person they were in earthly life (Uzgalis 2018).

All of aforementioned topics and authors have to be kept in mind when moving forward to Anthony Collins and William Coward. Even if neither of them held tradition nor authoritative

²¹ Victor Nuovo has argued for Locke's possible mortalist convictions (see Locke 2002: xxxii-xxxiii) and Bryan Ball has taken this argument even farther and identified Locke as thnetopsychist (see Ball 2008: 119-126). This means that even if Locke could have seated consciousness in soul, he probably would not have allowed this soul to exist somewhere in this intermediate state.

authors in high regard, they still thought and wrote in a paradigm shaped by Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke. Collins being Locke's student, adopted many of Locke's ideas, including his approach to identity and thinking while Coward borrowed Hobbes' argumentation against immaterial substance.

2. Christian Mortalism and William Coward

Following Martin Luther's call to discard church's authority and return to Scripture, protestants started paying more and more attention to what was actually written in the Bible and what was not. Many teachings remained untouched, but as it turned out, some "fundamental Christian truths" were not even once explicitly stated in Scripture. This meant that they could only be declared errors, blunders, or even conspiracies of Catholic fathers and as such had to be rejected. Theory of transubstantiation and the idea of an intermediate state for souls called purgatory are perhaps the most notable examples of doctrines that were deemed unbiblical and thus commonly abandoned by protestants. In case of the ontological status of immaterial soul, however, things did not seem quite as straight forward. Most maintained that the idea of immaterial soul as a separable substance is a true doctrine of Christianity. Others – namely Christian mortalists – claimed this idea fallacious as immaterial substance's existence is not even once claimed in Scripture.

It has to be stated right from the start that Christian mortalism was not a unified front against orthodox Christianity but rather consisted of different sects of thinkers – annihilationists, thnetopsychists, and psychopannychists – who had very different ideas regarding the events following death and the immaterial substance. Annihilationists held that there is no personal resurrection as soul gets annihilated with body at death, never to return. As such, even though annihilationists were regarded as Christian mortalists in the seventeenth century, their inclusion is a bit problematic because denying resurrection lands them quite far from orthodox Christian thought. Thnetopsychists also held that our soul gets annihilated at death, but unlike annihilationists, they thought that humans still get resurrected at final judgement. Under soul, however, they did not mean some separable substance but rather mind or a person as a whole. Finally, psychopannychists believed in immaterial soul that can be separated from body, but maintained this soul slept a dreamless sleep until resurrection. (Ball 2008: 19-20) The protagonist of this chapter, William Coward falls into the thnetopsychist camp of thinkers as he thought that humans perish as a whole and are resurrected as a whole. The idea of immaterial substance was for him a heathenish invention that should have been rejected with other erroneous teachings.²² He claims (with a certain irony) that Papists had more Scriptural

²² This is a reoccurring point in Coward's thought that he emphasises already in the full title of his first philosophical work *Second Thoughts Concerning Human Soul. Demonstrating the Notion of Human Soul, as Believ'd to be a Spiritual and Immaterial Substance, United to Human Body, to be an Invention of the Heathens, And not Consonant to the Principles of Philosophy, Reason, or Religion*. (Coward 1704, my emphasis).

evidence for their doctrine of transubstantiation than there is for spiritual substance, yet the protestants rejected the first but for some reason held on to the other (Coward 1703: 130).

Coward – like other Christian mortalists – based his claims on Scripture and as a result saw himself as a propagator of true religion. His contemporaries hardly agreed as he was often accused of atheism and according to *Bibliographia Britannica* commonly listed as one of the “[...] most rancorous and determined adversaries of Christianity” (Kippis 1789: 359). To understand this charge it is again important to remember the specific meaning of atheism in early 18th century. Even if Coward regularly attended church services,²³ did not doubt the existence of God, and constantly cited Scripture as proof for his claims, the problem in the minds of his opponents was never that Coward did not believe. The problem was rather in what he believed to be the true meaning of Scripture.

In what follows I will first discuss what Coward takes to be the true meaning of Scripture explaining also how he sees God and humans. Then in second section I will explain how Coward understands thinking in material substance. Finally, in third section I will return to death and resurrection to get the full picture of the most important and defining aspects of mortalist thought.

2.1 Scriptural Truth

In the beginning of Genesis, we are told that “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7, KJV). This could be interpreted to mean – as most orthodox thinkers thought – that God first created the body of Adam out of material substance to which he added the soul, immaterial substance. But as is evident from the quoted passage of Genesis, it is not explicitly stated which substance, if any, is breathed into Adam and this left room for nonconformists, such as Coward, to ask:

[...] what Rational Man can possibly conclude from thence, that God gave Man, by breathing into him, *A Spiritual Substance*? How comes *Breath of Life* to signifie a *Soul consisting of Spiritual Substantiality*, to speak in the Language of the *Metaphisicians*? (Coward 1704: 79)

For Coward – just like Hobbes before – ‘breath of life’ means nothing more than power or vital motion that originally gave life to matter. ‘Immaterial substance’ as it had originated from pre-Christian philosophies, could only be regarded as a heathenish invention that was corrupting true Christian teachings (Coward 1704: 74-77).

²³ At least Coward himself claims that (Coward 1704b: 246).

Of course, the Genesis 2 is not the only place where human constitution is mentioned and so Coward spends about thirty pages of his *Second Thoughts* solely on explaining the meaning of words – in English, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin Bibles – that have usually been interpreted to mean immaterial substance (Coward 1704: 156-182). To bring but a few examples, Coward quotes Gen 12:5. “Abram and Lot *took all the Souls they had gotten with them* into the Land of Canaan” and Gen 14:27 “The King of Sodom Said to Abram after their Victory, Give Me the *Persons or Souls*, and take Thou their Goods” and claims that soul is here used for person as a whole (ibid:157, my emphasis).²⁴ Soul could also – based on Scripture – mean life, breath of life, or different human faculties such as appetite, will or conscience (ibid: 171-172). Same holds true for every other word that could be interpreted to mean immaterial substance. ‘Spirit’, ‘life’, ‘mind’, ‘*ψυχή*’, ‘*nephesh*’, ‘*anima*’, ‘*spiritus*’ could all have multitude of meanings, but none of them signifies immaterial substance as for Coward “there’s not one word of *Immaterial Substance*, nay no equivalent Sentence to it that I find [in Scripture]” (ibid: 172-80, Coward 1704b: 178). But in Coward’s explanations we do find something called ‘immaterial’²⁵, which, at first glance seems rather unexpected or even contradictory to Coward’s own thesis. The fact that it is not, can be best explained when considering how Coward understands God.

2.1.1 God’s Essence

Though in his first book *The Second Thoughts* Coward talks a lot about God and his omnipotence – that also helps Coward argue himself out of difficult conclusions – he leaves God’s ontological status completely unexplained. This is troublesome, as Coward denies the existence of immaterial substance, he could be and in fact has been interpreted as saying that even God has to be material²⁶ – a conclusion Hobbes argued for. In fact, when looking at Coward’s rhetoric against immaterial substance, I think a clear Hobbesian influence can be detected:

Certain I am materiality [...] will accompany every man, that strives [...] from a Notion of *Substance* in his Mind, it being the necessary Fate, and Frailty of a Finite understanding. [...]

²⁴ Coward’s force here relies on the fact that if we take soul to mean immaterial substance, then how to understand Abraham only taking some part of his followers with him and leaving bodies behind. Second quote is even more direct in equating whole humans with souls.

²⁵ “The Word *Spirit* denotes, those *Beings* which are usually term’d *Immaterial* ; as God the Father, God the Holy Ghost, Angels [...] nay Spectrums or Apparitions [...]” (Coward 1704:172).

²⁶ For instance, see Charles Leslie’s *The Rehearsal* via Thomson 2008: 131–2.

Unexpanded Substance being as impossible to be conceived as an *eternal creature*, or Dead *Animality*. (Coward 1704b: 13-14)²⁷

Coward himself was cautious, however, to draw parallels between his and Hobbes' philosophies as he knew mentioning Hobbes' name was hardly the way to get any positive attention – "I know I shall be reciev'd upon the very account of *his Name*, both with Censure and Prejudice;" (Coward 1704: 71). Regardless, Coward admits that he has some sympathies for Hobbes's thinking but stresses that it is only because he himself had arrived at the same conclusion as no one's opinion should be held in higher regard than the truth (ibid: 71-73).

As a result, even if Coward agreed with Hobbes in claiming that 'immaterial substance' is nonsense, he did not agree with making God material. Instead, he found a third way out and pointed to John 4:24, where it is written that "God is a Spirit" (Coward 1704b: 58). Then pointing to Luke 24:39 Coward claimed that whoever tries to define spirit must unavoidably conclude that it is a being without "Flesh and Bones" (ibid). From here he allows himself some liberty in furthering this definition as long as it does not contradict what is written in Scripture. This means that he is free to claim that spirit must mean power (ibid:59). As power is immaterial therefore God, as power, must also be immaterial (ibid).²⁸ What this fundamentally means for Coward's philosophical system is that even though immaterial substance is a contradictory entity that cannot exist, immaterial "things" – such as powers or thoughts – still can.

Same ideas are important to keep in mind when dissecting Coward's views of human soul – he is not against there being something other than material in humans, he is just unwilling to give it the status of a substance.

²⁷ I think a possible Lockean influence has to be noted on the first pages of *The Grand Essay* (including just quoted section) where Coward lays heavily on the things within and beyond 'human understanding'. In the case of immaterial substance:

[...] such an *Immaterial Substance* may possibly exist, yet it is impossible for Human Understanding to conceive how it exists. Therefore when I say, *The existence of an Immaterial Substance is impossible*, I mean that it is above the Reach of Human Understanding to conceive, the possibility of its existence. (Coward 1704b: 3)

However, I do not think these remarks are enough to attribute to Coward a possible agnostic stance on the existence of immaterial substance, as he continues to claim that if something is beyond our understanding, we have to have Scriptural evidence for its existence. Further, if a thing beyond our understanding involves a contradiction '[...] that Thing may justly be pronounced to have *no Existence* at all.' (ibid: 3-5). As immaterial substance is not proved by Scripture and involves a contradictory nature, Coward can safely claim, it does not exist.

²⁸ Coward also thinks that understanding God as a power helps explain many things including the doctrine of Trinity (how three can be one and one three), how God can be in multiple places at once, and how God is eternal (Coward 1704b: 68, 72, 83).

2.1.2 Human Essence

While describing human soul, Coward returns to the quoted passage from Genesis claiming: “The Soul is a Breath originally infus’d by God into insensible Matter, by which it l[i]ves and exerts Sense and Reason” (Coward 1704: 77).²⁹ This breath or soul should similarly to spirit of God be understood as power given to Adam and – though it is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture – Eve (Coward 1704: 86; 169). From the creation onward, human beings have been perfectly capable of passing this power down from one generation to another by *ex traduce* – by way of generating new life for their offspring from their own life. As Coward so poignantly argues: “[...] Horse generates an Horse, a Dog his likeness [...] and why should man be exempt from doing so [...]” (Coward 1704: 118). If humans produced only some parts (bodies) of their offspring, it must be seen as humans not producing other humans but something other – humans producing beasts (ibid).

The continuation of the original power *ex traduce*’d to child from their parents is the cause that brings forth every other faculty – first, from power comes life, then from life senses, and thirdly from senses reason (Coward 1704: 83). For Coward, this chain firstly shows, how faculties of mind can come to exist without the need for immaterial substance to be present and secondly, is as much true in humans as it is in every other living being. This means that as animals are clearly alive, Coward has no problem in attributing them the capacity for understanding and reasoning (ibid: 83-4). He even claims that animals, like humans, have memory, some sort of will and that they are capable of ‘*Reflex Actions*’ because reflection is nothing more than “[...] Remembering, or Recollection of some one Action or other [...] done once or often, before;” (ibid: 97-8; 146). If animals have memory and they can think, they must be able to reflect on their actions.

The question that now has to be addressed is, if animals and humans have so much in common, then what, if anything, distinguishes one from another. Coward thinks – unlike Descartes before him – that the degree of perfection on its own is a significant enough basis for a meaningful distinction. We do not need a wholly human faculty to rise us above and separate us from beasts, all we need are more advanced and perfect faculties. A parallel can be drawn when we consider how a horse or dog is infinitely smarter than fly or a worm. Yet the only difference between them – according to Coward – is the perfection of faculties. So, if

²⁹Coward has written ‘loves’ instead of ‘lives’ which – though true – is not what he means here as evident from wider context of the passage.

horse is distinguishable from a fly solely on the basis of perfection, so can a distinction between humans and other animals be based on it (Coward 1704: 138-140).

2.2 Thinking Matter

Having sketched a picture of Coward's understanding of human beings, it is appropriate to focus in more detail on one of the most important faculties humans possess – faculty usually ascribed to immaterial substance – thinking. In what follows I show how Coward leaves Scripture aside and uses philosophical arguments to argue his case. This means that the following will also show contrarily to Burns' or Ball's claims that at least some mortalists used philosophical arguments. To start off, Coward is convinced that thinking is an action – some sort of movement – in the material brain (Coward 1704b: 124). He even (at least I think so) relies on his own experience as a physician in claiming that:

Whoever shall see the Brain of a Man whose Scull is Tresined or Trepann'd for a great fracture, may see it move like a Bed of Worms, or almost like boyling Lead, and it is interwoven with divers subtle Nerves and Arteries (Coward 1704b: 128).

This motion is produced by animal spirits or effluviiums that are first generated and then circulated in the brain.

Like Descartes, Coward saw animal spirits as entities made from very fine matter who were present throughout human body and performed different operations from digestion to local motion and of course played a key role in thinking (Coward 1704b: 163). They delivered sense data from sense organs and imprinted it to brain. But unlike Descartes, Coward thought that when sense data reaches brain, it does not enter into another substance, rather it continues to circulate in brain where it becomes thought – circulation of animal spirits becomes circulation of ideas (Coward 1704b: 129). We do not need a separate entity to judge sense data as animal spirits are perfectly capable of doing so on their own (ibid: 142). Even further, Coward reminds his reader the fundamental problem of dualism – how is sense data (or anything else for that matter) supposed to get from material to immaterial substance if these two substances are fundamentally incompatible.³⁰ As he does not think there is a satisfactory

³⁰ Coward even ridicules Cartesian idea that soul could somehow be in penial gland, claiming it to be but a "Philosophical Perplexit[y], or Romantick Assertion" (Coward 1704: 64).

answer to this problem, the only possible conclusion is to assume that thinking happens in material and not in immaterial (ibid). But of course, this is not the only reason Coward gives.

Connected to previous point, thinking in matter helps explain why changes in physical condition such as wound in the head or obstructions to blood flow affect thinking (Coward 1704b: 130; Coward 1704: 92). When we take matter to be essential for thought, it becomes evident why with the obstruction of animal spirits, restriction of blood flow or imbalance of humours our thinking also suffers – something that is not clear when we consider thinking to inhere in immaterial substance (Coward 1704b: 131). Even further, Coward thinks that attributing thinking to matter explains why thinking in childhood and old age are imperfect. Young bodies are not yet fully grown and as such not yet reached perfect organisation needed for rational thought. Similarly, aging bodies are no longer perfectly organised and so not capable of perfect thought (Coward 1704: 93-4).

Coward argues further that the very nature of human thought is incompatible with ideas we have of immaterial. When we look at human thinking, we see it has in itself succession of time and place – we do not think all of our thoughts at once (Coward 1704b: 122). But succession is usually associated with material and not immaterial substances. As such, Coward claims that if immaterial substance was the source of thought, our thoughts should resemble immaterial and be instant (ibid: 123). This idea is further illustrated by our understanding of God's omniscience. God is the only immaterial being we know of and though we do not know much about him, we do know that he knows everything – his thinking has no succession of time nor place in it. Now, if thinking in humans were to be done by immaterial soul, our thinking should resemble God's thinking. But as we are aware, it does not and thus substance that thinks in humans cannot be immaterial (Coward 1704b: 120-1).

If anyone should still be unconvinced, Coward draws our attention to the fact that thinking is tiring activity – after periods of hard mental work we get physically exhausted and need to rest to supply our body with food and drinks. This would be unconceivable for Coward if thinking was done in immaterial substance – how could substance, whose essence is thinking, ever get tired of thinking (Coward 1704b: 128).³¹ If, however, animal spirits are responsible, it is much easier to understand how food and drinks supply our thought with new energy.

³¹ On a contradictory note, about a hundred pages earlier, Coward also writes that immaterial substance as a principle always active, should actually tire itself rather quickly and then perish because everything that moves tires and no motion is perpetual (Coward: 1704b: 21).

Having given a brief summary of reasons Coward has for arguing that matter thinks, I will next focus on his approach to death as problems regarding death and resurrection were some of the most fundamental in all Christian mortalist thought.

2.3 From Death to Resurrection

When it came to longevity of Earth and all life on it, Protestant eschatology in the turn of 17th-18th centuries was more or less as optimistic as any contemporary reader.³² Still, it recognised that for most people there was at least small period of time between death and final judgement. The question then became what happens to people during that time. Catholics could have answered that after body dies, human soul goes to purgatory where – depending on who you ask – soul could or could not receive forgiveness for some of their sins (Almond 1994: 67-72). Protestants however, had discarded of this popish fable and had created replacements that tried to fill the role of a purgatory, while not being purgatory. Hades, Abraham's bosom or third Heaven were just some of the possible alternatives.

Coward did not approve. Like briefly mentioned, for him like other thnetopsychists there is nothing between death and final judgement. When humans die, they cease to be. 'Breath of life' they had returns to exist in God and when the time comes, God simply resurrects a body and again breathes into it a 'breath of life' (Coward 1704: 186-7). This means that purgatory as well as all its alternatives are simply unnecessary – as there is no immaterial substance that remains of a person after death, there is no need for a place, whether it be called third Heaven or Abraham's bosom³³ (Coward 1704: 224-5).

Though there is no intermediate state, Coward still maintains that there will be a resurrection. This was not received uncritically by his adversaries who thought that Coward's philosophical system could not account for resurrection. When he denies the existence of immaterial substance he was also seen as denying human immortality as those two things had

³² Some thought the end was already happening, others placed it about a thousand years into the future (See Almond 1993; Almond 1994: 17-23 for some accounts of worlds end).

³³ However, as it is written in Scripture (Luke 16: 22, 23), Coward seems to think that there at least was a place 'Abraham's bosom' refers to – a place of perfect happiness and harmony, possibly heaven. He maintains though that if Jesus or poor Lazarus were in this place, they were there with their bodies and not as immaterial substances (Coward 1704: 224-5)

fundamentally became one and the same.³⁴ Coward argued back that this criticism is unjust as he is in no way against human immortality. He just does not think humans are born with it:

Seeing *Eternal Life* is promis'd as a Reward to the Righteous, and the Gospel every where promises no other, I can see no reason why Man's Immortality can be asserted to begin before the General Resurrection (Coward 1704: 212).

Only after resurrection will people become immortal. Before that we are just as mortal as any animal who ever lived and died (Coward 1704: 135). Just like the quoted passage shows, immortality is promised as a gift for the righteous. Now what kind of gift would it be – Coward asks – if humans already were immortal (ibid: 130-1). Only way immortality could be seen as a gift would be to recognise that humans are not currently immortal and still have to wait for it.

Another reason to suppose that humans do not possess anything immortal comes from Coward's interpretation of Adam's digression. He constructs a following syllogism:

What was to have been Immortal in a State of Innocence, became Mortal by Transgression.

The whole Man was to have been Immortal in a State of Innocence. *Ergo*

Whole Man [...] became Mortal by Transgression. (Coward 1703: 62)

If only human body became mortal as a result of Adams sin, this could not be seen as a fitting punishment for the gravest sin humankind has ever committed but merely a 'bugbear', since humans retained their immortality in immortal soul (Coward 1704: 191). This would mean that as we have never lost our immortality, we have neither been adequately punished for Adam's sin nor do we need to wait for resurrection to be redeemed. So, for Coward, many fundamental teachings of the Bible would become meaningless unless we admit that humans are currently mortal.

Now, even if Coward could have convinced his contemporaries that his metaphysics still can account for resurrection, the next and equally difficult aspect to prove would be that his system can account for *personal* resurrection. It is not enough that people get resurrected and punished or rewarded, people need to get punished or rewarded for their own sins or virtues. Which brings us to the problem of personal identity – as Coward has discarded any possibility of immaterial substance, he needs to find another way of maintaining personal identity

³⁴ See for instance Broughton criticism in *Psychologia* (1703) (preface page 2) and Cowards replay on *Epistolary Replay to the Reverend Mr. Broughton* (Coward 1704b: 177-178).

throughout centuries of nonexistence. Locke – faced with similar problem – had tied identity to consciousness, but Coward thought he could tie identity directly to matter.

This could be done in claiming that the same particles – a numerically identical body – of the living person, get resurrected. But Coward does not think numerically identical body is possible even in life, let alone death as he explains:

At the general Resurrection we shall all be raised in our former Likeness, but our Flesh and Blood must put on Incorruption, and be spiritualized [etc.] And all this will be done to the very same living Creature, tho' the very flux Constitution of his mortal Nature be such, that as to Identity of Particles he is scarce ever the same from the Day of his Birth, to the Day of his Death, or Corruption in the Grave. (Coward 1704: 323)

What is rather needed is 'specific identity' – an identity based on distinguishing people after resurrection the same way they are distinguished in life, by their shape, figure, abilities, etc. (Coward 1703: 84-6). All that is needed for the resurrected person to be identical to living person, is an empirically verifiable sameness between the two. God simply makes a similar physical form from spiritualized matter, breaths into it the breath of life and with it restores a person back to life – fit to receive whatever rewards or punishments deemed just (Coward 1703: 52; Coward 1704: 107). For the resurrected, no time has passed – they wake up just like from a dreamless sleep and it does not matter if the sleep lasted for a night or a hundred years (Coward 1704: 206-7). Interestingly, Coward does not go into detail in explaining how memories or individuality get preserved when nothing of a person remains. Possibly because as thinking and memories are just states of material brain, then restoring the same material brain inevitably restores the same memories.

3. Philosophical Materialism and Anthony Collins

When Christian mortalists in general frequently found their way back to Scripture, philosophical materialists rarely if ever cited it in their defence. This does not necessarily mean that Scripture did not play any part in their writings, but when it came to making their case against immaterial substance, the fact that immaterial substance was not mentioned in Scripture, did not enter the picture. This of course also holds true in case of Collins and thus there is no point in writing a chapter titled “True Meaning of Scripture” in context of this thesis.³⁵ This also has the expected consequence that the terminology and ideas they use to argue against immaterial substance do not always overlap. Though Coward spoke about thinking, he mostly focused on souls, spirits, life etc. Collins on the other hand borrows his topics and terminology from Locke and thus his argumentation revolves around consciousness, emergent properties, and thinking. Regardless of this shift I think it will become quite clear that when Coward argued that the whole man is mortal, and Collins argued that personal identity consists in consciousness they fundamentally both argued for the same conclusion that there is no need for immaterial substance.

First, however, I must narrow down what is materialism as it could mean a few different things.³⁶ In this thesis, I mainly focus on materialism – as it was understood in the beginning of 18th century – as denial of immaterial substance called soul in humans. This way of thinking was greatly influenced by Locke’s *Essay* and so it focused to a large extent on proving how matter could think. This kind of materialism can of course also include denying immateriality as a whole – like in the case of Hobbes – but going so far was not necessary to earn materialist title. In what follows I will first discuss in detail Collins’ account of personal identity in his materialist system. With it I also must talk about his understanding of resurrection. Then I will turn my attention again to thinking matter and explain how Collins understands thinking in general, how does it work and how does he argue for it.

³⁵ Though Collins certainly held interesting views when it came to Scripture – from arguing that everyone should have a right to interpret it as they see fit in his *Discourse of Free Thinking* (1723) to possibly concluding that Scripture offers no foundation to Christianity. As Collins believes that prophesies of Old Testament were only fulfilled in a symbolic sense – and not in a literal sense – there is reason to believe that Jesus was *not* the messiah we were promised. For a detailed account of Collins’ possible atheism (in actual modern sense of this word) see Agnesina 2018 (especially pp 133-162 for a detailed account of Collins’ biblical criticism). Similar conclusion has been also argued by Berman 1988: 70-92 (especially pp 84-5).

³⁶ For an introduction into the problematic nature of the term ‘materialism’ see Tomson 2008: 20-2. For a detailed account of different strands of materialist thought see Lange 1877 especially pp 253-330.

3.1 Personal Identity and Consciousness

As I mentioned in introduction, Collins' was a close friend of Locke's in Locke's last years and so it is quite expected that Collins was greatly influenced by his thinking. Even if he later retracted on some of his earlier beliefs and went quite a bit farther than Locke, he still operated with terminology and ideas he inherited from him. As such it is only natural that when question of personal identity came up in Collins' *Correspondence* with Samuel Clarke, the discussion shortly turned to consciousness. Even further, consciousness became the main topic of *Correspondence* where both sides tried to show the superiority of their account – Clarke claiming that divisible matter was no suitable seat for consciousness, while Collins argued back not only that matter could be, but that it actually was the seat of consciousness (Uzgalis 2020; Collins 2011: 127). With it we can already see how Collins took Locke's position and pushed it to its limits. While Locke had remained agnostic on a substance our consciousness is in, Collins forcefully argues that it is a mode in material substance (Collins 2011: 232; Thiel 2011: 144). The question that now needs an answer is, what is a mode?

First thing to consider is that Descartes also speaks of modes. For him, modes are substance dependent ways of being. For example, figure is a mode of material substance (Smith 2017). Second thing to consider is where Collins himself defines modes. When distinguishing between different types of identity, he borrows Lockean distinction of four types of identity. First is identity of substance which equates to Locke's identity of body or matter.³⁷ Third and fourth are identities of man and person which again are borrowed from Locke (Collins 2011: 231-2). But second identity is identity of a mode, which Collins describes as

not being capable of a continuation of existence [...] but perishing the moment it begins, its identity cannot consist in being the same numerical mode of motion at different times, but only in being the same mode of motion that it was when it existed, and not another mode of motion. (Collins 2011: 231)

As second on this list, mode replaces Locke's identity of organisation. Considering this together with Descartes' concept of modes, I think we can get a quite clear picture of what Collins takes to be a mode – mode is a substance dependent way of being that rather than basing its sameness on numerical identity, remains the same as long as it fulfils the same goal.

³⁷ As Collins denies the existence of immaterial substance, the only substance this identity could belong to is material.

This in turn has implications for Collins' account of consciousness. As a mode, consciousness is in constant change – my consciousness today is not the same it was yesterday (Collins 2011: 147). Consciousness is an act that has but a brief existence after which it can never exist again (ibid: 234). But that does not mean nothing remains of each act of consciousness. As William Uzgalis points out, Collins also borrows Locke's distinction between consciousness as an act and consciousness as a representation (Uzgalis 2009: 374). So, even though each individual act of consciousness disappears, the representation of past acts can be transferred within one person from past self to present or even future self as a remembrance (Locke, *Essay*, II.xxvii.13).

Now, just to take a few steps back, consciousness is important because it accounts for personal identity, and personal identity is important because it is the basis on which we are going to get rewarded or punished in the next life. But as should be evident, Collins' account of consciousness as a mode that is in constant change seems a problematic host in which to seat personal identity. If people have but many successive acts of consciousness, what then constitutes their sameness? This problem does not remain unnoticed by Collins' interlocutor Samuel Clarke who points out that person needs something identical to remain the same:

So, if a man at forty years of age has nothing of the same substance in him, neither material nor immaterial, that he had at twenty [...] he cannot be *really and truly* the *same person* unless the *same individual numerical consciousness* can be transferred from one subject to another. (Clarke 2011: 181-2)

The force of Clarke's claim relies on the idea that if there is no sameness of substance, at least there would need to be numerical identity of consciousness, something that on Collins' account is impossible. If people could not remain the same even in this life, then how could they remain the same after death?

Collins, however, does not really see how consciousness as a mode could become problematic for satisfying the requirements of just judgment at resurrection. For him, death is just like sleep; it does not matter whether we close our eyes for a night or whether we lay in grave for thousands of years. As soon as we wake in the morning or open our eyes at resurrection, our consciousness carries on where it left off as nothing had happened in between (Collins 2011: 233). God only needs to restart or activate our consciousness that is filled with our memories of past actions and knowledge that those actions were indeed performed by us (ibid). Of course, this consciousness also needs a new body as it is dependent on body and so

Collins claims that a body shall be given. He remains a bit hesitant on the point of which body shall be given, allowing – based on Scripture – that the same body is resurrected but also claiming that it is not strictly necessary (ibid: 236). After all, it is not numerically identical body but rather our consciousness, our memories that makes us who we are (ibid: 233).

There is one additional thing to consider about consciousness before turning to thinking – the relation between consciousness as personal identity and identity of a man as body. This relationship has two sides. For first, Collins asks us to consider a man who is struck by a short fit of madness and in this state commits a serious crime.³⁸ He argues that when this man returns to his senses, no court would punish him as it is not the sober man who committed the crime but rather the mad one (ibid: 232). This example illustrates for Collins that as we do not regard the sober and the mad person to be the same person, there can be multiple persons in a single body: “The mad man and the sober man are really two distinct persons as any two other man in the world [...]” (ibid).

The second side of this relationship is brought to us via criticism by Clarke who notices that Collins still has not made and will not make a clear one-to-one relation between the person who is living and the person who is resurrected. This makes it possible in Collins’ account that God could resurrect one consciousness simultaneously in multiple different bodies – meaning one human could be resurrected as twenty (Clarke 2011: 193-5). That would not be just because nineteen of the resurrected “humans” are mere copies and would get punished or rewarded for something they did not do (ibid: 273).

Collins argues back – but only to an extent – that as it is part of Christian faith to believe in the resurrection of the same body, such a thing could not happen (Collins 2011: 236). But then he also bites the bullet saying that if indeed God raised multiple bodies with the same consciousness, then he would have no difficulty considering them to constitute the same person:

Because they all agree in, or have a present representation of, the same past action wherein *self* or personal identity consists – as my consisting of ever so great bulk of matter, or ever so many distinct beings, does not constitute different persons, but constitutes what we call *self*, by the sympathy and concern I have for each part united to me (Collins 2011: 235).

³⁸ An example he again borrows from Locke (*Essay* II xxvii 20).

This means that not only can one human body harbour multiple consciousnesses but also one consciousness could be – at least theoretically – in multiple bodies.

3.2 Thinking Matter

Though much of the discussion in *Correspondence* revolves around ‘consciousness’ it is important to note that – as Vili Lähteenmäki points out – neither Clarke nor Collins give a fixed, full definition of what consciousness actually is (Lähteenmäki 2014: 318-9). Even further, Collins claims that giving such a definition would be impossible. Reason for this is again Lockean and rooted in limits of human understanding. Just like Locke before, Collins distinguishes between acts of thinking and power of thinking and claims that even though the acts of thinking are known to us, the power of thinking remains unknown (ibid: 316). This means that even if we are capable of reflecting on our acts of thinking – the content of our consciousness – we are fundamentally unaware of the thing that thinks in us – the thing that is conscious in us. Consciousness is a mode, but exactly what kind of mode, remains unknown.

As we can see from this reasoning, Collins thinks that consciousness consists of acts of thinking (Collins 2011: 234). They are in effect one and the same and so when Clarke and Collins discuss whether consciousness could be attributed to material substance, they are simultaneously debating whether thinking could be attributed to material substance. The problem Collins needs to solve is quite a simple one, how to answer Achilles argument that unity of thought proves unity of thinking substance (Lennon; Straiton 2008: 1).

Collins starts off his case by claiming that thinking is actually not as unified as proponents of immaterial substance would like to present. He observes that our thinking has parts and succession, beginning and an end, continuation, and corruption – all the characteristics usually ascribed to material modes (Collins 2011: 127). We are capable of abstract thinking, dividing our thoughts or even completely stopping thinking (ibid). From this Collins argues that not only is human thinking more compatible with divisible substance, it is actually incompatible with indivisible substance:

But if the soul or principle of thinking be undivided, how can it think successively, divide, abstract, combine or amplate, retain or revive impressions in memory? And how can it be capable, partly or wholly, to forget anything? (ibid)

So, it is in accordance with our day-to-day experiences that thinking is a mode in material substance.³⁹

But not only thinking, like the quoted passage shows, Collins thinks that memory is also better explained by material. He observes that, we completely forget most of the things we do in our life, things that at one point we were fully aware of. Such forgetfulness does not sit well with immaterial substance that is supposed to be immutable and thus could not lose parts of it. Only material brain, whose parts are in constant flux, can account for forgetting or even remembering in the first place (Collins 2011: 130). To commit something into memory all we need is to repeat the idea so it would get imprinted first to particles of our brain. Then as time goes by, we have to repeat this idea again and again so it would get transferred from old particles to new (ibid: 147-8). Even if after some time all the particles of the brain get replaced, the memory remains.

To return to thinking – like memory – it can also be fully explained in material system as thinking itself is nothing but a mode⁴⁰ of motion in material system. This means that Collins can create a materialistic cause and effect chain that does not need additional immaterial substance to interfere at any point (Collins 2011: 212-3). First, we need some external material object to physically affect or contact us. This physical contact is important, because for Collins it helps to start the physical chain of thinking – with some atoms pushing others; like wind pushing the blades of windmill (ibid). Only from this contact can we get ideas to think about as Collins – just like Locke – does not think that we would have any innate ideas. From this contact some mode of thinking in animal spirits is activated that will in turn produce thoughts. It has to be stated that though Collins briefly mentions animal spirits as hosts for thinking, he does not really elaborate how or what role these spirits play (ibid: 218).

Having more-less successfully explained how thinking can be a material mode, Collins stumbles onto another problem, namely there is at least one thinking being whose immateriality few dare to question – that is God. If thinking, however, is material mode, God must also be material. Or at least so it would seem until we consider how God thinks and realize that his thinking is quite a bit different from that of ours. God's thinking does not have succession nor parts – he knows everything at once; his thinking is fixed and perfect and does not start with

³⁹ As an additional argument, Collins also observes that thinking tires us just as much as any physical activity. This can only mean that thinking must indeed be a physical activity (Collins 2011: 127).

⁴⁰ In fact, thinking is a collection of modes such as doubting, willing, knowing, pleasure, pain. Collins likens them to sound – it has infinitely many physical vibrations that all produce different sounds, different modes (Collins 2011: 214).

matter acting on him (Collins 2011: 214). All of this shows that God's thinking is different from ours – it is the thinking of immaterial substance. And it also illustrates how immaterial substance should think. If immaterial substance was to think in us – claims Collins – our thinking ought to be Godlike.

Having so far mostly focused on characteristics of thinking as an act, one important question remains to be answered about thinking as a power. Namely if matter is allowed to think then from where and how did this substance – that originally only has solidity and extension attributed to it – gain the power of thinking?

3.2.1 Where Does Thinking Come From?

Even though the term 'emergent properties' is not once used, Collins is arguing that consciousness, or a power to think is just that, an emergent property – a property that does not consist in the parts of the system but emerges from the whole (see Uzgalis 2020). He brings quite a few examples of such properties throughout the *Correspondence* but two most widely used are the examples of a rose and a circle. In the case of the rose – Collins argues – there is nothing in its parts that could produce its sweet smell on its own, but if all the parts are correctly joined together the sweet aroma arises (Collins 2011: 49). In case of the circle, Collins is making a point that even if the parts of a circle have some tendency – curvature – to become a circle, the parts themselves are not circles. This means that consciousness as an emergent property is not made from smaller consciousnesses but rather material parts that – though unconscious on their own, when brought together and correctly organised – will give birth to a consciousness (ibid: 125, 206-8).

It is important to note that consciousness is not made from some special kind of matter. As Collins sees things, all matter is basically the same. It consists of parts that all have the exact same potential powers in them – every particle is exactly the same as the next one. It is only due to their position in the system that different possible powers are actualised and can be combined to form some third power or property (Collins 2011: 71). As an example, Collins asks us to consider an eye – it sees but only as long as its organisation or 'texture' remains unchanged. If we alter its organisation, it stops seeing (ibid: 72). Similarly matter correctly organised could think, as long as its organisation remained suitable for such action.

Alternatively, Collins also considers the possibility of God superadding the power of thinking to material substance – it is fully in God's omnipotent powers to do so if he pleases.

But like described – and unlike Locke before him – Collins is perfectly content with allowing correctly organised matter to start thinking on its own (Collins 2011: 49).

I will end this chapter with two additional arguments for thinking matter Collins uses in the *Correspondence* that I think are worth mentioning to give an account of arguments available but also illustrate Collins' style of thinking. First of them returns to the incompatible natures of immaterial and material substance and second focuses on animal thinking.

3.2.2 Two Additional Arguments

As a first short argument, Collins observes that if an eye or an ear gets damaged seeing or hearing are obstructed. But if seeing or hearing are supposed to be powers connected to immaterial soul – meaning they should not be affected by matter – it is not clear, why with the loss of an eye we stop seeing (Collins 2011: 78)⁴¹. Or even, if thinking is material, it is easy to see, how our thoughts can produce our will to move our body – there would not be the problem of how the immaterial affects the material. Even if we for a moment hypothesise that there is some power in matter that acts as a messenger between material and immaterial substances, we are so completely unaware of its acting that we might as well consider this messenger to be the power of thinking and leave out spiritual substance (ibid: 214-5).

As a second argument, Collins claims that if thinking faculty is joined to the immaterial substance then animals – who are perfectly capable of producing thoughts – have the possibility of going to heaven. As this is something that cannot be allowed in Christianity, Collins offers some possibilities of how to solve this problem.

He starts off by assuming that if thinking is indeed joined to immaterial substance, then we have two alternative options to consider: either animals are actually mere machines, or they have souls, but their souls are annihilated by God after they die. Against the first possibility he argues that it is in accordance with our experience that animals are capable of thinking, learning and even reflecting on their actions. That means they are definitely not mere machines and must possess the faculty of thought. But if thinking is joined to immaterial soul, animals must also have immaterial souls. This in turn is a problematic supposition because souls – usually considered immortal – exist forever. Now Collins argues that as long as animal souls exist,

⁴¹ This is a bold claim that does not seem to have a clear target as most theories acknowledge the need for material organs in order for soul to exercise its potential powers.

they must perceive something – either pleasant or unpleasant. Perceiving something pleasant for all eternity, however, sounds a lot like heaven. (Collins 2011: 50-1, 85-6)

To stop animals from getting into heaven and being morally equal to humans, we need to consider the second alternative offered to us by Collins – that God annihilates animal souls after they die. This alternative becomes problematic because then immateriality or natural immortality of the soul does not guarantee actual immortality. Even if human souls are naturally immortal, God could just as easily annihilate them as he does animal souls. And this would make all the trouble spent on proving soul's immateriality or natural immortality meaningless anyway – ultimately nothing about soul guarantees its eternal life as it all comes down to God's grace. (ibid)

So, because arguing from the premise that the power of thinking is joined to immaterial substance inevitably leads to conclusions that Collins thinks even his opponents could not accept, the only alternative left is to regard thinking as not the faculty of immaterial but rather material substance.

4. Two (Dis)similar Approaches

Both Coward and Collins emphasised thinking on ones' own and not blindly agreeing with tradition.⁴² This is of course understandable, as an unorthodox thinker can rarely depend upon authority of his predecessors to make his case for him. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, this did not mean that they would or even could have been unaffected by ideas and understandings around them. Coward borrowed some ideas from Hobbes. Collins to an extent followed Locke. In this section I will then not restate possible Lockean nor Hobbesian influences as I have done this already in the relevant places throughout the entire thesis. I will, however, look at other possible influences who have shaped the thought process of Coward and Collins. After that I will compare the two systems and try to explain their complicated "relationship".

4.1 Coward's and Collins' Relation to Tradition⁴³

In the end of his *Second Thoughts* Coward lists about two pages worth of people's names and books he consulted while writing his *Thoughts*. It is a mixture of many eras and genres including different publications of Scripture, ancient philosophers – Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras – ancient poets and writers – Horace, Virgil, Thucydides – and some of his (more-less) contemporary physicians – Dr. Martin Lister, Dr. William Harvey (Coward 1704: 334-4). Of course, not all the works he cites are from authors he agrees with. Some examples being Joseph Glanvill and Henry More, whose understanding of extended soul Coward ridicules in a passing (ibid: 131-2). Hobbes' *Leviathan* is also on the list and as we have already discussed Coward agreed with Hobbes in quite a few points. But that does not necessarily mean Coward would have taken these points directly or solely from Hobbes as there is another work in Coward's bibliography that deserves our attention, Richard Overton's (fl. 1640 - 1664) *Mans Mortalitie* (1644) also titled *Man Wholly Mortal* (1655).

The *Mans Mortalitie* is perhaps one of the first influential defences of Christian mortalism in England (Ball 2008: 97). Prior to it there had of course been mortalist works – like Tyndale's

⁴² Collins later wrote an entire book called *A Discourse of Free Thinking* (Collins 1713) where he defends the idea that people may question everything – even ideas of the Church to see if they could hold true. Coward starts his *Second Thoughts* (Coward 1704) with couple of chapters dedicated to showing how indoctrination blinds us to truth.

⁴³ I must of course stress that a comprehensive account of influences cannot be given in this thesis of such limited scope. All I hope to do is pick out some examples to help better position ideas of Coward and Collins.

An Answer unto sir Thomas More's Dialog (1531)⁴⁴ – but non as systematic and successful as Overton's *Mans Mortalitie*, whose influence passed through Hobbes, Milton, and Locke into 18th century and beyond (ibid:48, 97). This means that when digging to the roots of Coward's mortalist thought, we must start with *Mans Mortalitie* and see what he borrowed from there.

Overton argued that humans are wholly mortal and that our immortality begins only at resurrection; that the doctrine of immaterial soul is an invention of ancient heathen philosophers (Overton 1675: 4). He also – like all mortalists to come – argued from Gen 2:7 that a 'breath' was breathed into Adam and only by this breathing he became a living soul (ibid: 29-30). So 'soul' is not a part but rather a whole living thing. Throughout his work he constantly quotes passages from Scripture to fortify his case. He claims that if only body dies, the resurrection cannot be considered a true resurrection at all, but rather taking something that already lives and giving it a body, which would be equivocal to "[...] restoration of flesh lost by Famine, sickness, &c." (ibid: 39). And finally for this thesis he had even constructed a same syllogism⁴⁵ Coward later used:

That what of Adam was immortal through Innocency, was to be mortalized by Transgression.

But whole Adam [...] was in Innocency immortal.

Ergo, all, and every part, even whole Man, was lyable to Death by Sin (ibid: 31-2)

So, a short answer would seem to be that Coward borrowed almost every Scriptural argument from Overton or if not directly from him then at least from mortalist tradition.

There is one other work I would like to consider and that is Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* (c. 1650-60). Inclusion of this text is a bit problematic as it was discovered only in 1825 and so Coward had no opportunity in his lifetime to consult it. But there are couple of minute details I would like to point out.

First, there is the creation of Eve. Like mentioned, Coward believed that God had to breath into Eve the same breath as he did into Adam. Otherwise, he argues there is no way Eve could have become a living being (Coward 1704: 169). Milton however claims that as Eve was made from a rib of Adam, there is no need to separately breathe into her a breath of life as matter from which she was created already had breath infused with it (Milton 1853: 190-1). This Milton's option was possibly missed by Coward and as he never got the chance to read Milton's

⁴⁴ Tyndale – who was perhaps most famous for his Bible translation, which brought him in opposition with the king and got him executed – argued in this letter that considering soul to be naturally immortal would undermine true scriptural religion (Ball 2008: 29).

⁴⁵ Section 2.3 of this thesis.

Doctrina we can but hypostasise how he would have reacted. Whatever his reaction might have been, however, I think it is safe to assume that it would be more reserved than his opposition for the next remark.

When it came to God's nature, Milton like Coward found John 4: 24 to claim that that "God is a spirit" (Milton 1853: 21). But when Coward took it to mean that God was immaterial power, Milton used it to illustrate that God is simple – undivided (Reesing 1957: 161). This has an important connotation for Milton. Namely that as God is simple, the doctrine of Trinity must be rejected – there are not three hypostases in God (ibid). This conclusion is the complete opposite of Coward's, who argued that taking God to be immaterial, spiritual power helps better understand how trinity might function (Coward 1704b: 68, 72, 83). Also, for Milton this 'spirit' is not necessarily immaterial (Reesing 1957: 161), a claim that would make Coward roll in his grave.

Now, let us turn to Collins. When Coward acknowledged to consulting two pages worth of books then Collins left behind a library consisting of more than 10 000 titles written on multitude of different topics and in many different languages (Agnesina 2018: 21).⁴⁶ This, one of the largest private collections in Europe gave Collins access to variety of ideas and authors and is too vast to even begin dissecting. It is only worth reassuring that it of course contained the works of all notable authors of his time: Locke, Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza etc. but also the entire philosophical contribution of Coward – *Second Thoughts*, *Grand Essay*, *Farther Thoughts*, and *Just Scrutiny*. I will not go through individual works in Collins' catalogue, but rather look at some key ideas in Collins' argumentation. For the first we must turn to Pierre Bayle and his massive *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697).

Hieronymus Rorarius was a papal nuncio who, motivated by a political disagreement⁴⁷ sometime in the middle of 16th century, wrote a treatise arguing not only that beasts reason, but they also do it better than humans (Bayle: 1737: 900). This text found its way into the hands of Bayle some century and a half later who dedicated about 17 pages of his dictionary solely on Rorarius. Most of his entry is not, however, descriptions of Rorarius' life and works, but consists of footnotes where Bayle extensively argues – based on ideas of multiple authoritative figures and against Aristotle, Descartes – that it is evident that animals reason (ibid: 902-3). This means that if thinking or reasoning is a faculty of immaterial soul then animals must have

⁴⁶ For a complete list of titles in Collins' possession see Tarantino 2007.

⁴⁷ Rorarius happened to be in a company of a learned man who had questioned the leadership capabilities of Charles V the Habsburg monarch of Holy Roman Empire (see note 'A' Bayle 1737: 900).

immaterial souls as well. It is important that those animal souls must be the same kind of souls that are in humans; they cannot be considered to be different based on the perfection of thinking no more than a soul of a child can be different from a soul of an adult (ibid: 906). As a result, animal souls must be eligible to all the virtues human souls are, including rewards or punishments on the final judgement (ibid). Or alternatively they might be annihilated by God when animals die (ibid). The first option is heathenish, the second is unlikely.

We are already acquainted with similar argument from Collins (section 3.2.2 of this thesis). It should be evident that – just like Agnesina argues (Agnesina 2018: 53-4) – Collins was intimately familiar with Bayle’s work⁴⁸ and his argumentation from thinking of the animals is most likely influenced by Bayle or possibly even Rorarius. There is, however, at least one fundamental difference in the aims of Collins and Bayle. When Collins used this argumentation to openly conclude that matter must be the source of thinking – in both animals and humans – Bayle does not reach this conclusion. This might seem odd, to simply not take the next logical step nor to offer a way out, but perhaps is not so. Bayle was an enigmatic author whose true aims remained a mystery (Lennon 2017). This of course meant that he earned a multitude of different labels from atheist to Calvinist or even Jew. A more forgiving interpretation would be to see him as a reporter – according to his own distinction between philosophical lawyers and reporters – who instead of making claims of their own rather communicates claims of others (ibid). Not picking sides even if there is an explicit contradiction. Whatever the aims of Bayle, it is quite clear that Collins again – just like in the case of Locke’s ideas – adopted what he could and took it to its conclusion.

For a second major influence we can look at Scripture or more precisely Collins’ attitude towards it. When almost every other philosopher in the 17th century still held on to Biblical authority – even the great “atheist” Hobbes tried to reconcile his teaching with Scripture – Collins dared to cast doubt on its irrefutable status. Of course, he was not the first to question integrity of the Bible – certain books’ canonical nature was doubted already by Luther and even Jerome and Augustine. But when they still held on to the authority of the Scripture, Collins firmly set it aside and gave our reason the prime status regarding the truth. He maintained that Scripture is just another historical account or testimony of things that are supposed to have happened (Collins 1709: 11) – no more certain than Suetonius or Thucydides for example. As we should not accept ancient historians’ testimony without critical evaluation, we should also

⁴⁸ And indeed, both Bayles *Dictionary* and Rorarius’ treatise later named *Quod animalia bruta ratione utantur melius homine* (That animals use reason better than humans) are in Collins’ library.

not accept Scripture without first assessing whether we can rationally agree that things claimed there could have taken place.⁴⁹ This has an expected consequence that while arguing for something we cannot simply quote a passage from Scripture as evidence for a claim as this very passage might itself turn out to be false.

As extraordinary as Collins' biblical criticism might seem, it would be remiss here to completely neglect the most infamous biblical critic of early modern period, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). Just like Collins in 18th century, Spinoza in 17th century opposed the naïve adaptation of Scripture and Church's dogmatic teachings (Nadler 2020). He claimed that as especially Old Testament was written down long after the depicted events took place and has been rewritten and copied multiple times ever since, it has been undoubtedly susceptible to corruption (ibid; Spinoza 2007: 137-8). With it the meaning of Scripture has muddled throughout ages. The only way out of this quagmire is to approach Scripture through rational investigation – only when considering the historical and linguistic peculiarities of the time when Scripture was written can we determine the true meaning of the text (Spinoza 2007: xii, 98). An important thing to note is that Spinoza distinguishes between 'true meaning of the text' and 'true facts' as ideas that authors of Scripture tried to communicate might have little to do with how things actually were (ibid: xii). From this a key difference between Collins and Spinoza emerges. When Spinoza still advocates the search for Scriptural meaning independent of how things are in actuality, Collins does not seem too concerned with Scriptural truths that have nothing to do with our rational understanding of the real world.

With this final remark, I think we have all the pieces to compare Collins and Cowards systems.

4.2 Collins' and Coward's Arguments Compared

On 16th of February 1704 Collins wrote to Locke to inform him of Cowards freshly printed *Grand Essay*:

⁴⁹ Collins can claim this because he refutes the classic distinction between "above reason" and "contrary to reason" that has been used to explain things in Scripture that are not possible according to our reason. For him everything that is, is either true or false according to our reason. There are still some things that we do not know of but as soon as we come to know them, they fall into one of those two categories. Nothing that can exist, exists in a way that is above our reason. And so, even Biblical teachings have to obey our reason. (Collins 1709: 19-23)

Dr Coward has publish'd a book to show that no such thing as Immaterial substance exists in nature and that all matter has originally a principle of self motion in it. his arguments are very far from proving either and are too mean to give you any account of. (via Thomson 2008: 117)

And Locke Replied:

by what I have seen of him already I can easily think his arguments not worth your reciting.
(ibid)

This is an interesting exchange of ideas, especially given the fact that as we have seen, many of those so called 'mean'⁵⁰ arguments are later used by Collins himself. Collins argued just like Coward that God's thinking is utterly different from human thinking and thus different substances must think in either. Both argued, against Descartes that animal thought – if it does not equal human's – comes so close that it is evident the same substance thinks in animals and humans. A small difference here being only that when Collins explicitly brings out the consequences of attributing rational souls to animals, then Coward thinks that bare mention of rational souls in animals is enough to dissuade anyone from attributing thinking to immaterial.

Both of them were also not happy with the concept of immaterial substance. How it should interact with material, how it should be able to learn or forget anything if it is immutable. Interestingly Descartes' dualism does not attribute memory, for instance, solely to immaterial substance but rather like imagination and senses, it depends on bodily organs (Hatfield 2014). This means that some of Collins' and Coward's arguments against immaterial substance that attribute mental faculties – like memory – solely on immaterial do not find a clear target, as no one seems to think that soul without body should be capable of performing those activities. But regardless, Collins and Coward still argue that material system on its own would better explain our mental processes – how thinking starts, how we learn or forget things, how outside influences can trigger different passions, etc. However, they do have couple of disagreements when it comes to the nature of thinking. First, when Coward claims that though matter thinks, the product of thinking – a thought – is immaterial (Coward 1704b: 137). Collins, on the other hand claims that we do not know the nature of power of thinking but acts of thought are most certainly motions in matter (section 3.2).

⁵⁰ There is a certain ambiguity concerning the meaning of 'mean'. To an extent Cowards style could definitely be characterized by rudeness, to take an example from *Second Thoughts*: "I am very sensible that Women and Babes in Religion, who require the Milk of the Word, and not such strong Meats, will, with open Mouth, Condemn [...] my Opinion, by reason of the Incapacity of their Judgments to fathom the depth of the Arguments propounded" (Coward 1704: Epistle Dedicatory). However, I rather lean to think 'mean' here is rather meant as mediocre as we have seen that the core of Cowards argumentation is borrowed from earlier authors.

Second difference comes from the fact that in Coward view, power of thought is derived from life originally given to Adam. Coward also implies that this power might be separable from matter, as after death life or power returns to God (Coward 1704: 186). Though in this separate state this power cannot exercise its ability to think – as discussed in section 2.3 – it still means that power to think is simple, uncompounded thing something that exists only as a whole. Quite contrarily Collins hypothesises that power to think is probably a compounded and not a simple thing. It is formed from different potential powers inherent in matter that under certain circumstances can actualise their potential (section 3.2.1). And so, it also could not ever be separated from matter.

They both of course argue that their understanding is not in any way dangerous to religion as it still can account for resurrection of the same person. Admittedly, as we have seen, they account for the same person a bit differently – when Collins seats personal identity in consciousness then Coward asks for an outward resemblance between earthly and resurrected bodies. And as a final nail in the coffin, they both notice that thinking is a tiring activity like other physical exercises. This can all only mean that thinking is performed by material body and there is no need for immaterial soul in humans.

Setting aside minor differences, I have so far shown how both Coward and Collins used similar philosophical arguments to further their cause but here the similarities stop. Though Collins names Scripture from time to time he does not quote it in his argumentation. No Genesis 2:7, John 4:24 nor any other widely used passage are to be found in his argumentation. The reason for this I think became obvious in the last section where I considered Collins' critical attitude towards Scriptural authority. So as a consequence, Collins does not use nor agree with using Scripture to defend materialist position.

This, I think, is also the reason for Collins' dismissive attitude towards Coward. As Scripture itself is not certain then all arguments based on it are destined to be uncertain and not to prove anything. Also, as I have shown, most of Cowards Scriptural arguments were not especially ground-breaking in the beginning of 18th century either. They had been used since Overton and possibly earlier, and so there was little reason for Collins to pay much attention to him.

Still, Collins' dismissive attitude might have been just a little premature. Indeed, the authority of Church and Scripture had slowly started to erode during the 17th century as emphasis was instead laid on intellect and new sciences to answer the important questions, but

Scripture's influence was far from gone. Science and reason were not at first seen as replacements for religion but rather ways of better understanding and defending it. Especially when it came to human condition. As I have shown, Scripture was still the number one text that had to be considered and consulted. Hobbes, Locke, Coward spent quite a few pages in their works interpreting scriptures and even Collins had to – at least publicly – fit resurrection along with some other Scriptural teachings into his system. Even if he did not actually argue for them, he at least showed that they were not contradictory to his views. He might not have liked it, but even he did not dare to openly go against tradition in every aspect. In sum, though philosophical materialism had started taking quite substantial liberties in discussing human faculties, purely philosophical argumentation – free from any kind of Scriptural influence – was just not yet widely available.

Conclusion

In my thesis I have analysed two main ways of arguing against the existence of immaterial substance in the beginning of 18th century Britain. On the one side was William Coward, who believed that the truth should be founded on Scriptural evidence, but also – as I have shown – did not shy away from using philosophical arguments. On the other side was Anthony Collins who mainly focused on philosophical argumentation and thought that Scripture itself is not a suitable foundation for true knowledge. Interestingly it seems that though Coward and Collins were driven by different ideologies, they focused on the same key ideas – God’s immateriality, unreasonableness of immaterial substance’s existence, animal thinking, personal identity etc. The most fundamental difference between those two authors lies in their different attitude towards scripture and its role in argumentation. As this role is so diametrically different from one author to another, those two approaches side by side also illustrate the nuanced role Scripture had in the beginning of 18th century. On the one hand, it had started to lose its authoritative status but on the other, it was still an integral part of philosophical argumentation.

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Abstract

In this thesis I aim to investigate what kinds of arguments were available in the first decades of 18th century Britain when following the footsteps of Overton, Milton, Hobbes, and Locke in doubting or denying the commonly accepted existence of immaterial substance. I look at two possible stands of thinking – Christian mortalism and philosophical materialism – in order to paint a more comprehensive picture that covers both arguments from Scripture and philosophy. As this thesis would otherwise become too convoluted, I focus mainly on two authors – free thinker Anthony Collins (1676 – 1729) who represents Philosophical materialist thought and physician William Coward (1657? – 1725) who represents Christian mortalist thought. I aim to show how those two authors argued against centuries of tradition while constructing their own understanding of human nature. In addition, I will also compare their ideas – see in what way they are similar and in what way they differ from one another.

Resümee

Immateriaalse substantsi eitamine 18. sajandi alguse Locke'i-järgses mõtlemises dr Cowardi ja hr Collinsi vaadete näitel

Oma magistritöös uurin, milliseid argumente kasutasid immateriaalse substantsi olemasolu eitajad Inglismaal 18. sajandi esimesel aastakümnel. Keskendun eelkõige kahele erinevale mõtlemise ja argumenteerimise viisile – kristlikule mortalismile ja filosoofilisele materialismile. Leian, et vaid siis, kui vaadelda piibellikke ja filosoofilisi argumente kõrvuti, on võimalik saada detailsem arusaam toona valitsenud intellektuaalsest olukorrast. Kuna aga kõikehõlmava ülevaate andmine ei mahuks selle töö raamidesse, siis keskendun eelkõige kahele autorile vabamõtleja Anthony Collinsile (1676–1729), kes esindab filosoofilise materialismi seisukohti, ja William Cowardile (1657?–1725), kes esindab kristlikku mortalismi. Ma näitan, milliste vahenditega mõlemad autorid argumenteerisid sajanditepikkuse autoriteediga immateriaalse substantsi õpetuse vastu. Samuti võrdlen kahe autori seisukohti ning analüüsin pühakirja rolli nende mõtlemises.

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